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April 21, 2011

The Honorable Patrick R. Donahoe
Postmaster General & Chief Executive Officer
United States Postal Service
475 L'Enfant Plaza, Southwest
Washington, DC 20260-0010

Dear Postmaster General Donahoe:

We are very concerned about the proposed closure and consolidation of postal operations in southwest Virginia and southern West Virginia.

Since February, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) has announced an Area Mail Processing study at the Bluefield Processing and Distribution Facility that proposes to move mail processing operations into Tennessee. It has also proposed thirty-one discontinuance studies in the USPS Appalachian District, including twenty-two post offices in the region surrounding the Bluefield facility.

There is a perception that the Postal Service is trying to balance its books by unfairly targeting rural postal facilities, despite guarantees in the law that forbid the USPS from closing small post offices "solely for operating at a deficit." Federal law requires the USPS to "provide a maximum degree of effective and regular postal services to rural areas, communities, and small towns where post offices are not self-sustaining."

In many cases, it is unreasonable to expect the citizens of the communities we represent to drive to other towns for their mail services, and to ask postal employees to transfer to far away cities to retain their jobs. It's difficult to envision how a "maximum degree of effective and regular" postal services for residents and businesses in rural communities can be maintained when mail processing operations are transferred to other states and postal facilities are targeted for closure in such an aggressive way.

While we are aware that the Postal Service offers assurances to affected communities about potential cost savings and minimizing disruptions to mail delivery service, we are not convinced it can fully justify those assurances, and know that there is little recourse if they prove inflated. Once a facility is closed or its operations moved, things are hardly likely to go back to the way they were.

As you solicit public comment, we urge you to keep in mind the non-financial factors required by law in deciding whether to close a facility – the impact on the community, on postal workers, on mail delivery services. In addition, postal customers must fully understand their rights under the closure processes: whether potential closures would occur under the full or expedited closure process; the opportunities for public comment and participation; whether the right to appeal the closure to the Postal Regulatory Commission will be afforded; and the potential impact on the community.

We look forward to hearing your plan for fulfilling these public service obligations.

Sincerely,

Nick Pollack

Mark R. Warner

Jim Webb

Jay Byrnes

Joe Manchin

B. Marjorie